SOURCE CREDIBILITY WHEN SEEKING CANCER INFORMATION AMONG A NATIONALLY REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE

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The purpose of this study is to identify patterns of source credibility for cancer information using a nationally representative sample of 6369 from the Health Information National Trends Survey (HINTS). Respondents were asked "How much would you trust information about cancer from…?" using 4-point Likert scales. The sources included were: doctor or other health care professional; family or friends; newspapers; magazines; radio; television; or Internet.

The four clusters identified using k-means cluster analysis were characterized as "alienated" (n=1381, 23.6%), with medium trust in physicians and low trust in all other sources; "naïve" (n=736, 12.6%), highly trusting of all sources; "typical" (n=2775, 47.4%), with high trust in physicians and medium trust in all other sources; and "unplugged" (n=955, 16.3%), which is distinguished from the "typical" cluster by its members' low trust of the Internet.

"Alienated" cluster members were more likely to have a personal history of cancer (OR 1.4, p=.02) and have household incomes under $25,000 (OR=1.8, p<.001) than those in the "typical" cluster. Members of the "alienated" cluster were also less likely to have at least a high school education than those in the "typical" (OR .47, p<.001), or naïve (OR=.58, p<.01) clusters. Further, the "alienated" cluster has significantly fewer non-white respondents than any other cluster (naive, p<.001; unplugged, p<.01; typical, p<.05).

An "alienated" cluster with little trust in most sources of cancer information comprises one-quarter of the sample. Physicians are the most trusted source and may represent the best route to reaching these individuals. Researchers and clinicians should strive to identify this potentially underserved and high-risk group.